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Andropov's Political Position: A Postplenum Assessment

An Intelligence Assessment

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An Intelligence Assessment

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Andropov's Political Position: A Postplenum Assessment

Summary

*Information available
as of 1 August 1983
was used in this report.*

Yuriy Andropov emerged from the June party plenum and Supreme Soviet session with his personal authority and political prestige considerably enhanced. His assumption of the presidency completed his acquisition of the powerful portfolio—head of the party, state, and defense council—that his predecessor had established over the years. References to Andropov as "head" of the Politburo in the nominating speech of his putative rival, Konstantin Chernenko, and in a postplenum party decree provided additional evidence of his preeminence.

Leadership changes made at the plenum—the addition of Grigoriy Romanov to the Secretariat, the appointment of Mikhail Solomentsev as head of the Party Control Committee, and the promotion of Vitaliy Vorotnikov to candidate membership in the Politburo—also strengthened Andropov's political position. These shifts isolated Chernenko in the Secretariat and brought a presumed Andropov client (Vorotnikov) into the leadership. Andropov's increased authority also was suggested by the removal from the Central Committee of two former Brezhnev associates who fell victim to Andropov's anticorruption campaign.

Despite these successes, it is not yet clear whether Andropov can translate this authority into effective political power. His failure to promote anyone to full membership in the Politburo or to remove any reputed adversaries suggests that the balance of power in that body has not been significantly altered. The Politburo, while smaller in numbers, remains much the same as under Brezhnev. Only two of the 11 full members—Defense Minister Ustinov and Foreign Minister Gromyko—have been consistently cited by various middle-level Soviet officials as Andropov supporters. He probably can also count on the support of Romanov, who is indebted to him, and Mikhail Gorbachev, with whom he has been cultivating an alliance. The other Politburo members are most often described by Soviet sources as politically uncommitted or opposed to Andropov. This gap between authority and power []

[] Andropov's lack of strong support would not prevent him from assuming the presidency, but had forced the General Secretary to back down from planned policy initiatives.

Andropov's plenum speech gave credibility to this report, suggesting that he was moving with great caution and deliberation. No new programs or significant policy departures were announced, and the speech was couched in broad philosophical terms. Andropov's decision to focus attention on revising the party program, however, could help legitimize desired policy shifts and allow him to set future policy agendas.

If the reports about Andropov's support are accurate, his efforts to make any important changes—such as those some of his backers would like to see in the economic sphere—could be running into some difficulty. Without a solid majority committed to him in the Politburo, Andropov, despite his recent gains, must deal with fluid political coalitions whose members are in no sense clients and whose support for specific policy initiatives must be earned.

Andropov's age (69) and uncertain health further complicate the situation and suggest that the setting of a policy agenda cannot be delayed indefinitely. If his health does not worsen dramatically, we would expect Andropov to gain greater control over both policy and personnel decisions over the next year or so, bringing into the leadership individuals who will follow his lead. If his condition deteriorates, however, particularly if long rest periods away from work are required, Andropov's efforts to further consolidate political support would probably be stymied. Moreover, the political maneuvers involving younger leaders, particularly Gorbachev and Romanov, suggest that succession remains a live issue within the Soviet elite.

Andropov's Political Position: A Postplenum Assessment

Leading Up to the Plenum

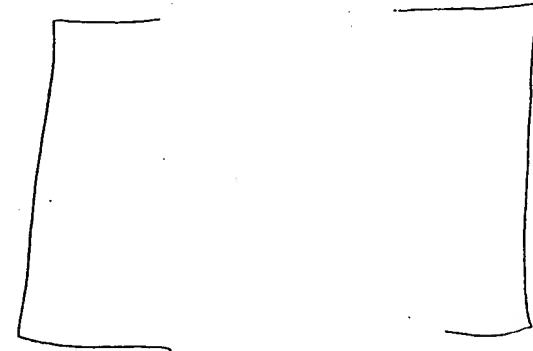
Andropov went into the plenum with considerable political momentum. In late March, Foreign Minister Gromyko, who reportedly is one of Andropov's strongest supporters, was appointed First Deputy Premier, strengthening Andropov's position in the Council of Ministers. This was followed in April by the replacement of Ivan Kapitonov, a Brezhnev appointee, by Yegor Ligachev as head of the Central Committee's Organizational Party Work Department, which oversees cadre appointments.

In the months preceding the plenum, various Andropov loyalists and former associates had been insisting that he would capitalize on his improved position by pushing through major personnel shifts at the plenum.

They conveyed some disappointment that Andropov had not moved more rapidly on this matter, claiming that personnel changes were a prerequisite for any significant change in the economic mechanism. These expectations probably were fueled by their high hopes for Andropov as well as by the opportunities the depletion of the leadership ranks since early 1982 presented to him. Death and retirement had reduced the Politburo to 11 members, its smallest size since the 1960s. The Secretariat, responsible for day-to-day management of the party apparatus, was also smaller than it had been during Brezhnev's latter years, and only three of its nine members (Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, and Mikhail Gorbachev) held Politburo rank.

Leadership Changes

Andropov, however, clearly was unable to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by this thinning of the ranks. The full membership of the Politburo was not altered, and two presumed Andropov clients with potential eligibility for advancement—Yegor Ligachev and party secretary Nikolay Ryzhkov—failed to move up.



Andropov, nevertheless, was able to push through some personnel shifts that strengthened his position. Lacking a strong clientele in the party apparatus, he adroitly put forward leaders whose political careers had languished under Brezhnev. This tactic gave him some leeway to expand his support within the existing leadership while adding only one client to it.

In what is clearly the most significant shift, Leningrad party boss Grigory Romanov—already a Politburo member—was added to the Secretariat. While there is no evidence to link the careers of the two men, Romanov's greater visibility in the leadership has coincided with Andropov's rise to the top. In April, Romanov was given the opportunity to head a delegation to Finland and, benefiting from Chernenko's illness, to lead a party delegation to the Karl Marx celebration in Berlin.

This alliance is politically expedient for both men. Romanov's career had stalled in Leningrad for 12 years, his standing among Brezhnev's inner circle

damaged by personal indiscretions. His pressing need for a patron to move him to the political center coincided with Andropov's desire to increase his flexibility and influence in the Secretariat.

Beyond purely political calculations, Andropov probably was attracted by Romanov's innovative managerial style, intolerance for dissident activity, and stress on worker discipline. In an era when the Soviet Union's economic problems can no longer be solved merely by increasing investment, Romanov offers a blend of organizational and technological approaches that could have wide applicability. In Leningrad, he has been instrumental in promoting new approaches to planning and management, such as "social development" plans and production associations, that have been adopted on a national scale. As Leningrad Oblast is a center of defense industry in the USSR, Romanov presumably has expertise in this area as well. He also has championed the application of advanced technologies to increase industrial growth—an approach Andropov endorsed once again in his plenum speech.

Traditionally, control over the party Secretariat has been essential to a new party leader's efforts to establish his preeminence in the Politburo. With Romanov in the Secretariat and the apparent alliance Andropov has formed with Gorbachev, the party secretary and Politburo member responsible for agriculture, the General Secretary's influence over the Secretariat has been substantially enhanced. Within the Secretariat, Gorbachev has apparently been given responsibility for personnel assignments. He presided over the installation of the RSFSR Premier and the new Leningrad party chief. Romanov seems likely to assume overall responsibility for heavy industry, supplanting candidate Politburo member Vladimir Dolgikh, whose relationship with Andropov is not good.

By transferring Romanov to the Secretariat, Andropov may have effectively isolated Chernenko. He is now one of four Politburo members who simultaneously serve in the Secretariat, and Andropov seems to have limited his portfolio to ideology. While Chernenko's delivery of the plenum's keynote address on ideology confirmed his inheritance of at least part

of Suslov's responsibilities, Andropov's remarks on the need for a revised party program effectively stole Chernenko's thunder.

Andropov obviously intends to be the leading party spokesman on all major questions, including those of ideology.

Two other personnel changes set in motion by the plenum—while not as significant in power terms as Romanov's transfer—also appear to benefit Andropov. Vitaliy Vorotnikov became a candidate member of the Politburo and replaced Mikhail Solomentsev as RSFSR Premier, while Solomentsev was named chairman of the Party Control Committee, replacing the deceased Arvid Pelshe. Both men had been shunted to the sidelines during Brezhnev's tenure and may have been ready and willing candidates for Andropov's patronage. Solomentsev had moved from the Secretariat in 1972 to the RSFSR premiership. Since that time he has been passed over on several

Central Committee mandate to clean up the corruption left by Medunov.

Vorotnikov set the tone for his anticorruption campaign in Krasnodar on his arrival by making his second secretary pay for a lavish welcoming party. This reputation for incorruptibility apparently attracted Andropov's attention.

Vorotnikov also brings to his present position extensive experience in industrial party management. In the mid-1970s, when he was first secretary of the Voronezh Oblast Party Committee, he contributed an article to a prominent party journal that called for greater economic inputs from specialists, more bureaucratic accountability, and increased efficiency—ideas that seem in accord with Andropov's.

The promotions of several officials from candidate to full membership in the Central Committee appeared to favor the military and underscore Ustinov's influence and importance as an Andropov ally. Those advanced included First Deputy Chief of the General Staff Sergey Akhromeyev, who was promoted to Marshal of the Soviet Union earlier this year; Deputy Defense Minister Vitaliy Shabanov, a known Ustinov protege; and Minister of the Machine Tool and Tool-Building Industry Boris Bal'mont, a longtime defense industry official.

The plenum also strengthened Andropov's position by boosting his prestige and acknowledging him as the preeminent leader within the Politburo. He now has the offices and titles Brezhnev took years to acquire. His rival Chernenko even referred to him as "head" of the Politburo—a plaudit Brezhnev did not receive until nine years after he became party leader. The weeks following the plenum have provided further confirmation of Andropov's standing in the leadership:

- Participants in the June/July regional party meetings were effusive in their praise for Andropov's elevation to the presidency.
- Andropov's plenum speech was consistently cited as providing guidance for the regional meetings, and *Kommunist* published it ahead of Chernenko's report, even though the latter was presented first.

occasions for voting membership in the Politburo, a status traditionally accorded to the RSFSR's chief administrator. Although he has yet to win full membership in the Politburo in his new post, such a promotion may be in the offing if Andropov's power continues to grow. Andropov may intend to use a revitalized Party Control Committee as a key instrument in extending the anticorruption campaign to party ranks, a move that the expulsion of two Central Committee members could foreshadow.

Solomentsev's new job also provided Andropov with an opportunity to promote Vorotnikov, an apparent client, to Politburo ranks. Vorotnikov has enjoyed two rapid promotions since Andropov's return to the Secretariat in May 1982. Under Brezhnev, Vorotnikov's career suffered a setback when he was replaced as Voronezh Oblast first secretary and appointed Ambassador to Cuba in 1979. Such assignments usually signal honorable exile. In June 1982, however, he was brought home to become party chief in Krasnodar Kray, replacing former Brezhnev associate Medunov, who was ousted for corruption.

Vorotnikov is viewed as a "Mr. Clean" and was given his Krasnodar post with a

political divisions within the top leadership remain, particularly as regards economic priorities, and Andropov apparently does not yet have a solid majority behind him.

Prior to the plenum, both Defense Minister Ustinov and Foreign Minister Gromyko were consistently cited [] as Andropov supporters. In addition, the promotion of Romanov and the broadening of responsibilities for Gorbachev since Andropov became party leader suggest that these two men, at least for the present, have joined his camp. The other six Politburo members, however, have been variously described [] as uncommitted or opposed to Andropov. The latter category includes Brezhnev loyalists Chernenko, Premier Nikolay Tikhonov, and Kazakh party chief Dinmukhamed Kunayev.

- The ~~face~~ or collective leadership has been largely abandoned. Regional party leaders specifically refer to Andropov's statements and speeches as guides for their own actions.

Although the above examples tend to confirm Andropov's authority, it is not yet clear whether the General Secretary can translate this into effective political power. Andropov has yet to develop sufficient support in the Politburo to alter its political balance—either by promoting supporters or removing opponents. Despite several vacancies, the Politburo's full membership was not changed at the plenum, a compromise that Andropov may have had to accept for the gains he did achieve. The signs of debate on economic policy in the press and the tentative approach evident in proposing new economic policies suggest Andropov has encountered some opposition in making changes in this area as well.

The gap between Andropov's political authority and his political power to effect policy changes is further reflected [].

[] claimed that the lack of strong support within the Politburo would not prevent Andropov from assuming the presidency but had forced him to back down from planned policy initiatives. The ability to overcome this policy hurdle may hinge on Andropov's power to create a Politburo more to his liking. For now,

Andropov's Speech

Andropov's plenum speech buttressed the impression that he lacks consistent majority support on the Politburo and suggests that he either does not feel confident of his ability to get the desired measures adopted or has not yet fully formulated his strategy. The speech, which focused on long-discussed revisions in the party program, was couched in broad, philosophical terms and did not unveil any major new programs or significant policy departures.

Throughout his speech Andropov emphasized the need to improve the economic mechanism, raise productivity, and enforce the socialist principle "to each according to his work." Yet he failed to make any concrete proposals to improve the situation, noting that "we have not yet studied properly the society in which we live and work." Would-be economic reformers probably can take some satisfaction, however, from Andropov's failure to rule out any specific approaches to studying economic problems.

Andropov offered two strategies to raise labor productivity, which he described as "the key task in the economic sphere"—the increased utilization of technology and an increased reliance on labor discipline.

He complained that the present system often discourages technological innovation and that managers who risk the introduction of new technologies are often penalized. Andropov called for new incentives to encourage such risk-taking and "make work in the old-fashioned way impossible."

While Andropov held out hope that the technological revolution might one day eliminate the need for manual, monotonous labor, his message to workers and consumers was essentially a conservative one—work harder and produce more. Stressing that equal access to the material goods produced by society awaits a Communist utopia, he defended wage differentiation as a means of increasing labor productivity.

Although Andropov devoted more attention to consumer issues than he has in previous speeches, his remarks chiefly served to deflate consumer expectations. He professed dissatisfaction with the traditional measurements of consumer welfare—income growth and the production of consumer goods. Instead, he proposed a standard of "reasonable consumption," a concept so broad as to appear meaningless. Soviet consumers are not likely to be reassured by Andropov's set of indexes (including the "aesthetic use of free time and quality of public order"), which purport to measure their improved standard of living.

The most interesting comments in Andropov's speech, touching on key aspects of Soviet economic planning, were, perhaps purposefully, the least developed. Taken as a whole, however, they do indicate that Andropov favors a broad reevaluation of current economic policies:

- His suggestion that the managerial apparatus can be reduced in size and excess personnel reassigned to areas with labor shortages represents a departure from current Soviet practice.
- His reference to "price formation" as a key area requiring further study implies that he believes the system of administratively determined prices is not doing the job.

• His admission that the quantitative "oversufflment" of production plans may be misguided also strikes at the heart of current Soviet economic practice.

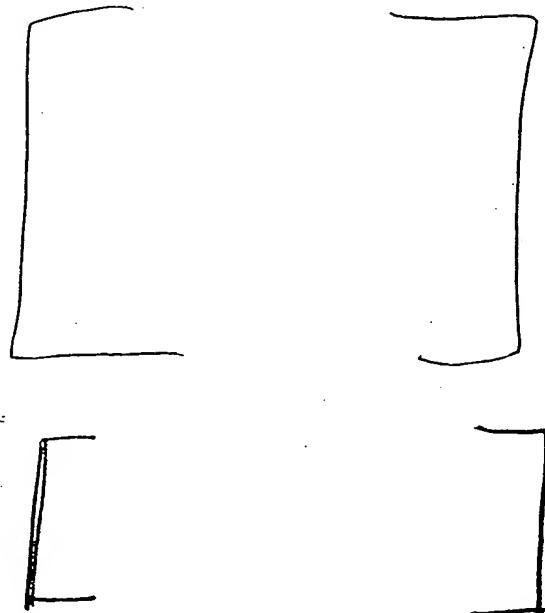
• Finally, in calling for a stricter separation of party and state functions, he appears to be associating himself with technocrats and managers resentful of excessive party tutelage and, perhaps, with rumored proposals to abolish or reorganize the Central Committee's economic departments.

In sum, the immediate effect of the plenum, at least in the economic arena, is to leave many loose ends and postpone major changes. Soviet sources are saying that a long-expected plenum on management reform now will not be held until next year. The changes Andropov proposed in the party program, moreover, must be approved by a party congress that need not convene until 1986. If Andropov could garner sufficient political strength, however, an early party congress could be convened to ratify shifts in economic policy.

Prospects

Andropov emerged from the plenum with his personal status enhanced. His appointment to the presidency confirms his preeminence in the leadership and is further evidence that the General Secretary is secure in his post. Although rumors persist about policy disputes and opposing coalitions in the Politburo, it is unlikely that opposition forces could directly threaten Andropov's rule. Although Andropov did not effect widespread personnel or policy changes at the plenum, he appears to be making gradual progress in consolidating his power base by improving his position in the Secretariat.

At the same time, Andropov's age (69) and uncertain health raise questions about his ability to consolidate his power or place his personal stamp on Soviet policy.



With time, both Gorbachev and Romanov are likely to emerge as contenders for Andropov's position. For now, their presence in the Secretariat dilutes Chernenko's influence. In addition, they could well become rivals. Development of such counterweights is a tradition in Soviet politics that has been used by Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. Such competition could provide protection for Andropov, should he become more feeble. Andropov obviously intends to keep a close eye on Romanov's ambitions, however, as Gorbachev seems to have been given cadre responsibility. The presence of both Gorbachev and Romanov at last month's installation of Romanov's successor in Leningrad—a man we believe would not have been Romanov's first choice for the post—suggests an effort to keep Romanov in check.

For now Andropov remains firmly in charge. If his health remains stable, he should be able to continue his political progress, consolidating support for his policies and placing allies in key personnel slots. His physical condition suggests, however, that the next succession looms in the background of all political maneuvering.

More important, perceptions of his health problems by the ruling elite could become a source of political weakness

Andropov's frail appearance at the plenum cast a mood of uncertainty over the gathering and generated considerable gossip among the participants. If Andropov comes to be viewed as an interim leader because of this, he might find it difficult to generate support for controversial economic initiatives or necessary changes in Politburo membership.

Moreover, Andropov's health and the political maneuverings involving younger leaders such as Gorbachev and Romanov also suggest succession remains a live issue within the Soviet elite. Romanov now joins the select club of full Politburo members who are also Central Committee secretaries (Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev) and from whose ranks the General Secretary has traditionally been chosen.

**Interlocking Directorate of
the Soviet Leadership**

Party	Poliburo	Date of Birth	Election	Secretariat	Regional Post	Government	
						Council of Ministers	Presidium of Supreme Soviet
Full Member							
Andropov	6/15/14	4/27/73		General Secretary			Chairman
Aliyev	5/10/23	11/22/82				1st Deputy Chairman	
Chernenko	9/24/11	11/27/78		Ideology			
Gorbachev	3/02/31	10/21/80		Agriculture			
Grishin	9/18/14	4/09/71			Moscow party chief		Member
Gromyko	7/18/09	4/27/73				Minister of Foreign Affairs and 1st Deputy Chairman	
Kunayev	1/12/12	4/09/71			Kazakhstan party chief		Member
Romanov	2/07/23	3/06/76		Heavy industry (?)	Leningrad party chief		Member
Shcherbitskiy	2/17/18	4/09/71			Ukraine party chief		Member
Tikhonov	5/14/05	11/27/79				Chairman	
Ustinov	10/30/08	3/06/76				Minister of Defense	
Candidate Member							
Demichev	1/03/18	11/03/64				Minister of Culture	
Dolgikh	12/25/24	5/24/82		Industry			
Kuznetsov	2/13/01	10/03/77					1st Deputy Chairman
Ponomarev	1/17/05	5/19/72		Nonruling Communist parties			
Rashidov	11/06/17	10/31/61			Uzbekistan party chief		Member
Shevardnadze	1/25/28	11/27/78			Georgia party chief		
Solomentsev	11/07/13	11/23/71			Party Control Committee		
Vorotnikov	1/20/26	6/15/83			RSFSR Premier		
				Kapitonov—Light Industry and consumer goods			
				Zimyanin—Propaganda, ideology			
				Rusakov—Ruling Communist parties			
				Ryzhkov—Economic management			